

IN A BLIZZARD'S GRASP

THE WORST STORM THE CITY HAS EVER KNOWN.

BUSINESS AND TRAVEL COMPLETELY SUSPENDED.

NEW-YORK HELPLESS IN A TORNADO OF WIND AND SNOW WHICH PARALYZED ALL INDUSTRY, ISOLATED THE CITY FROM THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, CAUSED MANY ACCIDENTS AND GREAT DISCOMFORT, AND EXPOSED IT TO MANY DANGERS.

The storm of wind and rain, which began to sweep over this city and the neighborhood on Sunday evening, gathered force as the night progressed. The temperature began to fall, sleet and snow descended in succession and the wind became boisterous. Before daylight dawned yesterday a remarkable storm, the most annoying and detrimental in its results that the city has ever witnessed, was in full progress. When the people began to stir to go about their daily tasks and vocations they found that a blizzard, just like those they have been accustomed to read about as occurring in the far West, had struck the city and its environs and had laid an embargo on the travel and traffic of the greatest city on the continent.

What the presence of a blizzard meant was soon manifest. Before the day had well advanced, every horse car and elevated railroad train in this city had stopped running; the streets were almost impassable to men or horses by reason of the huge masses of drifting snow; the electric wires—telegraph and telephone—connecting spots in this city or opening communication with places outside were nearly all broken; hardly a train was sent out from the city or came into it during the entire day; the mails were stopped, and every variety of business dependent on motion or locomotion was stopped.

Thus the city, to a great extent, was at a standstill yesterday, and the prospects are not much better for to-day. People vexed at the collapse of all the principal means of intercommunication and transportation became reflective, and the result was a general expression of opinion that an immediate and radical improvement was imperative. So the blizzard may accomplish what months, if not years, of argument and agitation might have failed to do. Probably if it had not been for the blizzard the people of this city might have gone on for an indefinite time enduring the nuisance of electric wires dangling from poles; of slow trains running on trestlework, and slower cars drawn by horses and minkling the streets dangerous with their centre-bearing rails. Now, two things are tolerably certain—that a system of a really rapid transit which cannot be made inoperative by storms must be straightway devised and as speedily as possible constructed, and that all the electric wires—telegraph, telephone, fire alarms, and illuminating—must be put underground without any delay.

The elevated roads and the elevated electric wires are not only made useless by a severe storm, but they are made dangerous. The city is liable to be put into darkness and the consequent perils. There is also the danger of conflagrations through the failure of the fire alarm wires.

To the great majority of municipal and suburban New Yorkers the great blizzard was a surprise party of the worst kind. It began soon after midnight, and those who work on newspapers—editors, reporters, compositors, pressmen, as well as the news vendors—went home between 2 and 4 o'clock yesterday morning realizing that an unusual tempest had begun. So did the marketmen and milkmen when they turned out for their matutinal labors. The milkmen, in fact, were in many cases unable to get any milk at the stations on account of the non-arrival of the trains; the news vendors did not leave the morning papers at the houses, and the bakers failed to come round with the morning rolls. Thackeray says that it is the small ills of life that worry the most, and probably thousands of New Yorkers yesterday morning—good, steady, churchgoing heads of families—when they had to get through their breakfasts without their favorite newspaper, their hot buttered rolls, and their fragrant coffee enriched with the boiling milk, began to seriously question whether life was worth living after all, with all those trials and tribulations to undergo.

The other comic journals have made lots of fun over the woes of New-Jerseymen and other suburban residents on account of their morning journeys to the city. Yesterday, on the whole, the Jerseymen, the State Islanders, and such Brooklynites as use the ferries had the best of it. It was the New Yorkers themselves who were in trouble, and they began to realize its extent the moment they left their homes.

As early as 7 o'clock the snow had got a good deal too deep for stout men to travel in with ease, and the rapidity with which it grew worse was simply marvelous. The wind seemed to have a rotatory motion as well as a terrible, direct propelling force. It had a power of slinging the snow into doorways and packing it up against the doors; of sifting it through window frames, of piling it up in high drifts at street corners, of twirling it into hard mounds around elevated railroad stations, such as most New Yorkers had never seen before. For the first time in their lives they knew what a Western blizzard was.

Not that the wind was at all content with such doings. They were merely its playful tricks. Its spite was shown in driving showers of sleet and icy shot into one's face that stung worse than the stings of the modest hornets. If the hapless pedestrian tried to escape by turning his face away, the first thing he knew an extra gust took him, whirled him around like a teetotum, and, giving him a dose of sleet that blinded him and generally used him up so that he didn't know anything, left him to his fate for the nonce utterly and completely disengaged.

Before rather hugged the flattering delusion to their souls that it took a pretty good man to handle them, came to the conclusion before they had got many rods from their places, and that home hit the nail on the head when he sang "Home, Sweet Home." Having come to that conclusion they turned round, and in a few minutes found that it was true. Their wives, these prudent men had fine chances to get along with their families. The schools did not keep, and Young America, boys and girls, being unable to get out of doors, made things as lively and interesting indoors as their great abilities were sufficiently lively. Some thousands of men,

women, boys, and girls could not conveniently keep away from their vocations, and most of these tried to get to their destinations by the elevated trains. They didn't do it to any great extent, but as New Yorkers are apt to do, they got a good deal of fun out of their discomforts. Nobody who participated in any of the itinerant scenes of yesterday can deny that New Yorkers are the best-natured people in the world. To state it generally, all the transportation lines in the city ceased operations by 9 o'clock in the morning. Most of them were of no use after 7 o'clock. Trains started from Harlem crowded with people—becoming jammed with people as they advanced—who were in a hurry to get to their work. Slowly and more slowly they ran, and at last the doleful information came that they could go no further. Yet there was little or no profanity even among the men. Stories were told, jokes were cracked, and jovial good-fellowship prevailed. Nobody put on any airs. The aristocratic banker and merchant was "hail, fellow well met" with the artisan, helpful to the shopgirl, and kind to the inevitable old lady whom even the blizzard couldn't keep at home.

Probably the average time which a citizen occupied yesterday morning in getting from his home anywhere above Twenty-third-street to his place of business down town was three hours. About half of the distance was made in the elevated trains, and the rest on foot. The walking was the quicker of the two, and perhaps a trifle less dangerous, though tripping over electric wires, dodging falling signs and glass, and involuntarily tumbling around in ways which Barnum's most skilled gymnasts could vainly hope to equal, were not altogether consonant with bodily safety. Where the elevated trains were stalled between stations, novel ways of escaping were occasionally devised. For one train, stuck in front of the repair shop of the Fire Department on West Third-street, the shop hands rigged a temporary platform from the windows to which ladders extended, and by that means the passengers were enabled to reach the street.

It is due to the elevated roads to say that they ran longer than the street railroads, and it is due to the street railroads to say that they did better than the cable roads, not that that is saying a great deal, for the cable roads did not run at all. There was no effort made to move the cars. The ice and snow frozen over the tracks made it simply impossible for the grips to reach the cables, so there was no use in trying. In adopting this course their managers have one advantage over the horse car folk. Their cars are in their houses ready for use when they can be used. But the horse cars are scattered over the city, standing around promiscuously wherever their drivers and conductors deserted them. There was an abandon, so to speak, in the manner of doing this that was really delicious. Whenever these public servants made up their minds that it was not expedient to continue the performance of their duties any longer, they simply unhitched the horses, mounted them, and rode off. The passengers disembarked at their leisure, and pursued their winding way on foot. The truckmen and even the drivers of express wagons followed the same course. All over town deserted trucks and wagons are to be seen. The fact was the cutting wind and the stinging sleet were unendurable, and men grew desperate and thought only of finding a warm spot.

It's an ill wind that blows good to nobody, and even a blizzard throw money into some pockets, particularly those of the cabmen. Those gentry reaped a harvest. Gentlemen who could afford to pay for a little speed—not much, not nearly so much as they expected after Jehu had got them into his power—hired cabs and hacks, and were driven to their offices. The usual fare was \$25 from the Hoffman House (or any nearer place) to the region south of Canal-street. It is a most incredible story, but it was currently reported that in more than one instance liverymen refused even these extortionate fares, saying that the lives of their drivers were worth more than money. There is no instance of a cabman himself refusing.

Of course the effect of the storm upon the transaction of business was paralyzing. Yesterday had been selected by several of the great dry goods stores for their "Spring openings." It is needless to say that the "openings" were unavoidably postponed. In fact, most of the stores where many clerks are employed were short-handed, or would have been, if there had been anything to do. Those that employ saleswomen were nearly destitute of help. Factories also did very little business through lack of operatives. As far as money making was concerned, about every place in the city might just as well have been shut up yesterday, as open, except the hotels, the restaurants, and the liquor saloons. They were well patronized. The down-town hotels especially were crowded last night. There was not a vacant room in the Astor House, French's, the Metropolitan, or Earle's. Many of the suburban residents who reached the city with comparative ease by means of the ferries made up their minds to "let well enough alone," now that they were here, and to make sure of being in hand for business this morning. They made the hotels lively last evening, and caused the hearts of the landlords to beat with joy. These suburban visitors were mostly Jerseymen and others, who could have reached here by the ferry. Very few persons were brought here by the trains, probably fewer than have ever come to New-York in any day since railroad trains began to run.

While the actual loss of life yesterday was small, the accidents of a more serious nature were numerous, and people overcome, either by the wind and sleet, or by over-exertion, were continually being taken into shops for restoration. Probably all the serious after effects of the storm upon persons will never be known. Doubtless hundreds of lives in this city were shortened without any remarkable signs of injury. It will be not easy to estimate the pecuniary losses on account of the blizzard. The total stoppage of business on the Exchanges means the loss of many thousands of dollars. The cessation of manufactures means the loss of many thousands more. So does the stoppage of transportation by sea and land. How many laboring men will miss their expected day's wages no one can accurately tell. But lots of poor families will have to scrimp and save even a little more closely than usual on that account alone. And the actual damage to property must run into the hundreds of thousands.

Empty theatres, deserted and dark streets, howling winds, and general desolation marked New-York after sundown. Most of those whom the unkindness of fate had allowed to reach down town in the morning managed to get home during the afternoon, or to find quarters for the night. It was the streets cannot well be conceived. The electric lights were nearly all out, and locomotion was perilous.

In looking back at the events of yesterday the most amazing thing to the residents of this great city must be the ease with which the elements were of service to overcame the boasted triumphs of civilization, which particularly in these respects have contended permanently and markedly our civilization and distinguished it from the civilization of the old world—our superior means of intercommunication. Before the fury of the great blizzard they all went down. The elevated trains became useless; so did the telegraph wires, the telephone wires, the wires for conveying the electric lights, the wires for giving the alarms of fire. And, worse than that, they were the alarms of danger.

It is hard to believe in this last quarter of the nineteenth century that for even one day New-York could be so completely isolated from the rest of the world as if Manhattan Island was in the middle of the South Sea.